



Environmental Impact Statement for Army Transformation at Fort Lewis and Yakima Training Center, Washington

Project Description

The U.S. Army at Fort Lewis, Washington, proposes to transform its forces from the current Legacy Force to the proposed Objective Force, while at the same time implementing sustainable resource use management on Fort Lewis and Yakima Training Center (YTC), a subinstallation of Fort Lewis.

The purposes of the proposed action are to (1) provide the Army with greater flexibility in developing training missions and strategies in response to rapidly changing world conditions, and (2) to enhance resource stewardship by more closely integrating training activities with the capability of training lands to support current and future training needs.

The requirement for change within the Army is based on the emerging security challenges of the 21st century. Chief among these challenges is the need to be able to respond more rapidly to different types of operations requiring military action. The strategic significance of land forces continues to lie not only in their ability to fight and win the Nation's wars, but also in their ability to provide options for shaping the global environment to the future benefit of the U.S. and its allies. This will require a military force that is more responsive, deployable, agile, versatile, lethal, survivable, and sustainable across the entire spectrum of operations than the current Legacy Force.

The Army also recognizes that it must sustain high quality training lands to provide soldiers with realistic training conditions. To meet that objective, the Army proposes to develop a Resource Sustainability Management Plan that would ensure that levels and types of military training on each installation are related to the condition of land resources. If resource conditions begin to deteriorate, training activities would be mitigated to reduce impacts to resources. Implementation of a sustainable environment ethic would ensure that environmental conditions exist in the future to meet the training and deployment needs of both current Legacy forces and proposed Objective forces, as well as the needs of non-military use, while preserving quality-of-life values on both installations.

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Code of Federal Regulations 32 CFR 651, the Army is required to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) when the proposed action has the potential to significantly affect environmental quality, historic or archaeological resources, sensitive species or habitats, or public health or safety. An EIS for *Army Transformation at Fort Lewis and Yakima Training Center, Washington*, will be prepared that analyzes the potential impacts to the natural and human environment from the proposed action and a number of alternative actions.

Frequently Asked Questions

Army Transformation

Q-1. Why were Fort Lewis and YTC selected as locations for Army transformation activities?

A. As a major military post, Fort Lewis has the existing facilities necessary for transformation, as well as a strategic location for deploying forces to the Pacific Rim. The heavy brigade and light brigade currently stationed at Fort Lewis provide ample personnel to initiate the transformation, and because Fort Lewis has a Corps Headquarters, it has the leadership necessary to transform these existing brigades into the vision of what the Army needs for the future. Yakima Training Center provides a broad expanse of land (327,000 acres) on which forces can train. The proximity of McChord Air Force Base and the Port of Tacoma provides for the direct deployment of Army personnel throughout the world.

Q-2. How long will it take for transformation to occur?

A. It is projected that transformation to the Objective Force could take up to 30 years, although some transformation activities are already underway at Fort Lewis. Initially, transformation has involved the conversion of two brigades at Fort Lewis into Interim Brigade Combat Teams (IBCTs) that are more mobile than the Legacy Force but that are using mostly off-the-shelf equipment. As new equipment becomes available, including future combat systems that incorporate state-of-the-art technology into a light armored vehicle, and units on Fort Lewis become skilled in the use of this equipment, the Army will begin to field the Objective Force.

Q-3. Would training activities on Fort Lewis and YTC change under transformation?

A. The IBCTs at Fort Lewis will be trained as an early-entry combat force that will operate in small-scale contingencies on complex/urban terrain. These IBCTs will be capable of deployment anywhere in the world within 96 hours after liftoff. Thus, most training will focus on urban fighting/training in small 'villages' that are being constructed on Fort Lewis to simulate urban warfare conditions. Troops will also train to rapidly deploy with their equipment from McChord AFB and the Port of Tacoma. While at YTC, troops will focus their training on learning to operate light armored vehicles over different types of terrain.

Q-4. What types of units and new equipment would be used by the Army at Fort Lewis in the future?

A. It is likely that forces training at Fort Lewis will consist of light infantry units that will focus on operations in complex terrain, and other units that will focus on high intensity conflicts. The future combat system (FCS) will be the primary weapon/troop-carrying platform for the Objective Force. The FCS platform will be able to process reconnaissance, surveillance, and target-acquisition information using a light-armored vehicle that is 50% smaller and 70% lighter than the Abrams tank, while having similar lethality and survivability. Each FCS will have capabilities for wireless communication and sensor-data receptions, and could have precision missiles and electromagnetic guns. It is anticipated that the FCS that will be used by the Objective Force will be ready for production within 10 years.

Sustainable Resource Management

Q-5. What are some important resources of concern for each installation?

A. Environmental staff at Fort Lewis have identified prairie and oak habitats, fish and wildlife species of concern, and water quality as being important resources on the Fort that could be adversely impacted by military and other activities, including transformation. At YTC, potential impacts to western sage grouse, salmon habitat, water and air quality, and cultural resources would be monitored closely.

Q-6. What is meant by resource sustainability?

A. Resource sustainability refers to a method of managing resources on Fort Lewis and YTC to ensure that they are sustained at levels that meet or exceed current levels, regardless of the types of training or other activities that occur on the installations. For example, the Army proposes to use light armored vehicles as the warfighting vehicle platform for the FCS. As troops train with these vehicles, they will disturb the soil and cause erosion, potentially impacting water quality in streams and rivers. If more troops train on Fort Lewis and YTC in the future than the Army currently envisions, the potential for serious impacts to water quality could increase greatly. To ensure that water quality is not degraded, the number of troops allowed to train on each installation may decrease, or troops may be required to train in different areas or at different times of year to reduce adverse impacts to water quality.

Q-7. How does resource sustainability differ from current resource management on Fort Lewis and YTC?

A. Resource sustainability management would require Fort Lewis and YTC to follow similar management objectives and work collaboratively to ensure that training activities do not adversely impact resources on either installation. Both installations would track resource condition and its relation to training, and make ongoing adjustments in the type and level of training in response to resource condition. This approach also requires military units to take greater responsibility for environmental impacts they may cause, and to be more proactive in preventing or minimizing impacts. Currently, resource management has more of a short-term focus, and limited adjustments are made in response to changes in training types or levels. Given that many characteristics of the Army of the future are unknown at this time, resource management must be flexible and adaptive to future training scenarios while still protecting resources.

Q-8. What would be done to ensure that military training does not adversely impact resources?

A. A Resource Sustainability Management Plan is being prepared along with the EIS. The plan would identify key resources on each installation that Army environmental staff identified as indicative of health of the land. These resources would be monitored to establish condition trends, and condition threshold levels would be developed for each resource based on federal, state, or local regulations, or scientific studies. As long as resource conditions remained above threshold levels, and the trend did not suggest that threshold levels would be violated, military training would be allowed at existing levels. If resource conditions deteriorated, the types and amounts of allowable training would be adjusted to reduce impacts to the resource. If the resource improved, however, more training would be allowed. Resource management on Fort Lewis and YTC would be more flexible and adaptive under resource sustainability than it currently is.

Q-9. What effects can the public expect to see as a result of the proposed action?

A. From a military training standpoint, the public would see little change during transformation. The number of troops stationed at Fort Lewis may increase by about 2,000, but training activities would be similar, although light-armored vehicles would be used instead of Abrams tanks. As part of resource sustainability, resource managers would solicit more public participation in land use decisions, especially those decisions that have regional implications. The Army would also provide more information to the public about ongoing and proposed resource management activities through the Army website and newsletters than currently occurs.

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Development Process

Q-10. What is the purpose of the EIS?

A. The EIS will assess the likely impacts from Army transformation and resource sustainability actions to environmental and socioeconomic resources at Fort Lewis and YTC. The EIS will also provide comprehensive NEPA documentation for use by Fort Lewis and YTC in planning training exercises, and will serve as a baseline cumulative impact assessment. An Environmental Assessment was prepared in 2001 to evaluate transformation activities during the initial and interim phases. The EIS will evaluate transformation activities during the later phases, including the Objective Phase.

Q-11. Are tribal, federal, state, and local governments involved in the EIS effort?

A. The Army will coordinate closely with tribal, state, and local governments throughout the development of the EIS.

Q-12. When is the EIS scheduled for completion?

A. The Draft EIS is scheduled to be completed in the fall of 2003, and the Final EIS in late spring of 2004.

Public Comment

Q-13. How can the public comment on the proposal?

A. The public can provide comments on the proposal orally or in writing at public scoping meetings, in writing during the public scoping period (October 1 through October 31, 2002), or during additional public comment periods associated with the Draft EIS and Final EIS. Written comments can be mailed to: Mr. Bill Van Hoesen, Project Manager, Public Works, AFZH-PWE MS17E, P.O. Box 339500, Fort Lewis, WA 98433-9500. Comments can also be faxed to Mr. Van Hoesen at (253) 966-4985, or emailed to vanhoesb@lewis.army.mil.

Q-14. Where will public scoping meetings be held?

A. Public scoping meeting will be held from 6:00-9:00 p.m. in three cities near Fort Lewis and YTC:

- October 15, 2002 at the Westcoast Gateway Hotel, 9 North 9th Street, Yakima, Washington
- October 16, 2002 at the Elks Lodge, 119 West 5th Street, Ellensburg, Washington
- October 17, 2002 at the Tyee Park Elementary School Gymnasium, 11920 Seminole Road SW, Lakewood, Washington

Q-15. What will be done with these comments?

A. The comments will be compiled and summarized by major resource areas and issues in a Scoping Summary Report. Public comments, and the Scoping Summary Report, will be used to evaluate issues and concerns associated with the proposed project, and to develop alternatives. The Scoping Summary Report will be made available to the public in late 2002. A mailing list will also be prepared of those individuals and organizations who request the Draft and Final EIS and updates on the progress of the EIS.

Q16. How can I find out more about the proposed project and follow the progress of the EIS?

A. A website is currently under construction on the Fort Lewis website and will be available in autumn 2002.